

Following the Allied Drive

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FOLLOWING THE  
ALLIED DRIVE

Special Orders

No. *215*

14th Aug. 1918.

**Extract**

*Par. 14* Pursuant to authority contained in letter from Hq. S.O.S., dated 4th January, 1918, Captains C. B. Waterman, A.C. Sig. R.C., and J. P. Sweet, A.S.C., will proceed from Paris, France, to Headquarters First Air Brigade, reporting upon arrival to the Chief of Air Service for temporary service, upon completion of which they will return to Paris, France.

Travel by automobile is authorized.

The travel directed is necessary in the military service.

Official:

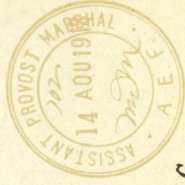
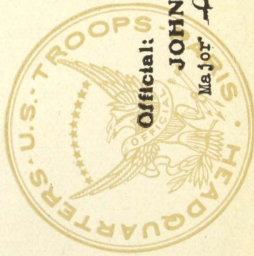
**JOHN F. DAVIS,**

*Major* ~~Captain~~, 3rd Cav.,  
Asst. Adjutant

**By Command of Brigadier General Harts:**

**T. G. HUNTER, Jr.,**

*Major*, U. S. M. C.,  
Adjutant



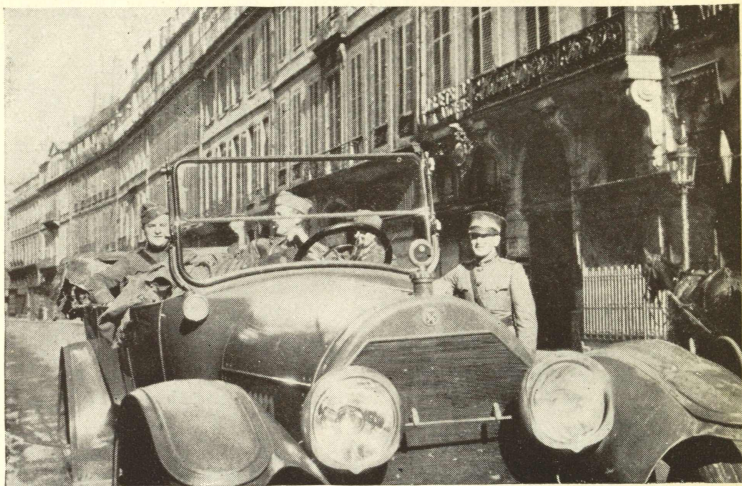


## Following the Allied Drive

An account by MAJOR C. B. WATERMAN,  
Chief of Transportation of the Air Service,  
of a day's experience in U. S. 14839  
Cadillac Touring Car

TRAVEL by Automobile is authorized." These words typed on an A. E. F. "travel order" meant that a military journey would be a never-to-be-forgotten trip—rather than a few more of those "hours of pain" so frequently spent in a stuffy, foul-smelling compartment in a French railway coach. The first step, therefore, after learning that one was ordered to go somewhere, was to try to impress upon the "powers that be" the un-wisdom of waiting for a train. The next step—whether

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A sunny start from Paris

the intending traveller were a second Lieutenant or a Colonel—was to rush to the office of the Transportation Division and demand or beg (depending on his rank) a Cadillac.

My first two months in the A. E. F. were spent in investigating motor transportation problems in the Air Service. Later, as Chief of Transportation for Air Service, I travelled up and down the American front and to many of the most important supply depots and training centers in the "Zone of the Rear."

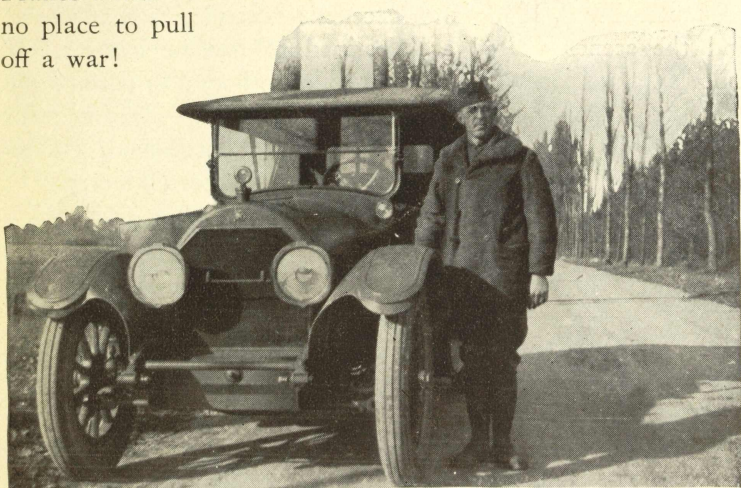
To be in France in those days, playing that most exciting of all games—the game of war—where the stakes were even more than kingdoms and lives—the very existence of Civilization; to have a position whose interest covered the entire range of the

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American Sectors and all parts of the S. O. S.; and to have a car at one's beck and call might be thought to be good fortune necessarily. Yet the question of fortune or misfortune depended upon the *car*. A car at one's beck and call can become a burden when the "becks" begin to overlap the "calls." Not only did every trip have to be made in the least possible time, but the start had to be made as soon as the necessity arose, regardless of the hour, day or night! "Fritz" did not call a recess on fighting for Sundays or holidays, so our work went on regularly seven days in the week, and frequently with office hours twenty-four hours per day. By the same token, no halt was called because of rain—if they fought only on bright days, France would be no place to pull off a war!



A Cadillac Sergeant



When you consider that on the darkest, sloppiest and rainiest of nights, you might be called upon to take a two hundred mile drive, the question of *what* car became vital. It became even more so when you remembered that even in the open country your head lights had to be dimmed, and that there were no towns where you could use more than your side lights. Even these could be used only when the lenses had been daubed with the dark blue paint, and in the towns near the lines they had to be entirely extinguished.

The work, of course, called for many interesting trips—some of them filled with exciting events that can never be forgotten. In all of those trips my Cadillac car, U.S. Number 14839, was an essential and inseparable part. One expedition back of the lines on September 8, 1918, is an excellent example, as that period and the scenes visited are destined to become historic. It followed a portion of that circuit which is bound to become the route for thousands of tourists and sightseers—starting from Paris, passing through the First Marne battle-field, Villers-Cotterêts, Soissons, Fismes, Rheims and Chateau Thierry.

It was on a Sunday, and the Fourth Anniversary of the First Battle of the Marne, and the French were celebrating on that part of the field where the battle was decided. At the same time they were celebrating in an even more effective manner by following up their gains in the fighting between Soissons and Rheims, driving the German line back to the famous Chemin des Dames.

My own immediate work was quiet for the day and it seemed to be the one great opportunity to take notes on the work of the French in transport, and road up-keep under artillery fire.



I left my own car in the Service Garage for a hard-earned looking-over under the watchful eye of my sergeant-chauffeur (he ought to have spent that day in making up lost sleep, but would not turn in until he had seen the wants of that car properly cared for) and called out a road car and its driver at the luxurious hour of 10:30 A. M. Starting at such an hour made it seem almost like a pleasure trip.

I would like to have had the enjoyment of doing my own driving for a change, but that, of course, could not be—in view of the strict A. E. F. regulations against officers driving their own cars. The main reason for this was that too many cars had already “gone to Fritz!” If there were always two men at least in a car on a trip near the lines, the chances of its returning were twice as good as when there was only one man to be picked off by a piece of shrapnel, or a shot from a stray sniper.

The lines were changing so rapidly back and forth that a piece of road might be perfectly safe at one moment and, two hours later, lined with German machine guns or snipers, and vice versa. As a consequence of accidents of this kind, there were certain German generals enjoying Cadillac



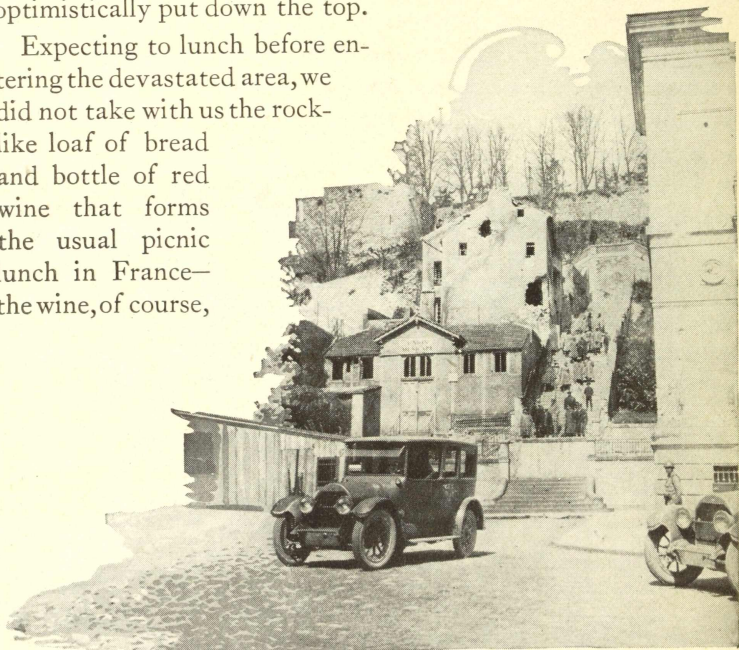
Major C. B. Waterman, Chief of  
Transportation of the Air Service



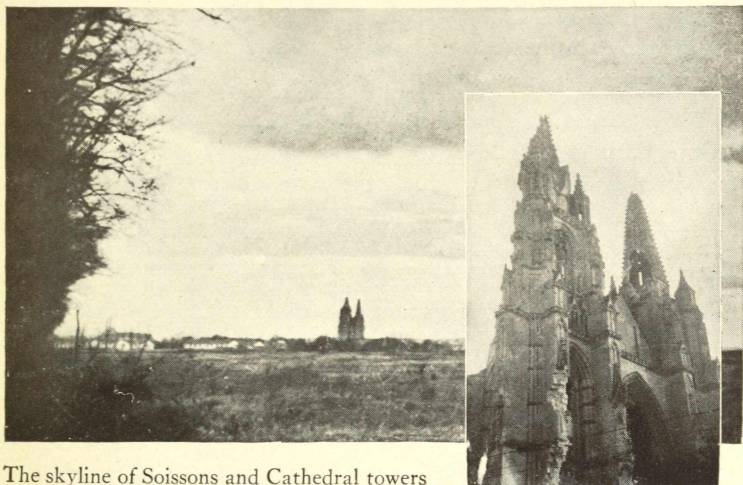
cars! It was even reported that by his Imperial patronage, the Crown Prince himself was defiling two cars—a Cadillac and a Rolls-Royce, the latter lifted from a British Staff Officer. So, when we embarked in front of my hotel, I reluctantly took my seat in the tonneau, as one of the party of five.

It was a typical French day, with a bright sun one hour and heavy clouds the next, but it was one of the bright hours when we started, so we optimistically put down the top.

Expecting to lunch before entering the devastated area, we did not take with us the rock-like loaf of bread and bottle of red wine that forms the usual picnic lunch in France—the wine, of course,



Descending a grand staircase leading to chateau



The skyline of Soissons and Cathedral towers

only because the doctors said it wasn't safe to drink the water. The balance of our usual motoring equipment was, however, on the job—that is, gas masks, tin hats and haversacks.

This haversack or "musette," as it is called by its French inventors, is the invariable A. E. F. suitcase. You took it with you on a trip of two days or two weeks. On a short trip you filled it with clean clothes, a package of cigarettes and a toothbrush, but on a long trip you had to leave out the clean clothes to make room for enough cigarettes. It is a canvas and leather affair, of about the same size and design as the bags we used to carry to school (completely filled with a sandwich and a geography) and is carried on a strap over the shoulder in the same way. For this trip we had filled our haversacks with cigars, cigarettes, and a few cakes of sweet chocolate.



All of which were for the benefit of the French soldiers, from whom we expected information — smokes being scarce among the poilus.

We passed the Opera and drove out the Avenue Lafayette to the Paris gate (the Porte Pantin) and beyond that we took the historic route over which the Army of Paris drove in the Paris taxicabs to help turn the final tide in the first Battle of the Marne and save Paris. It is now renamed the Boulevard Gallieni in honor of their General who conceived the idea for what is probably the greatest and most successful taxi party the world has ever seen.

Within a half hour's drive from the center of Paris, one began to see the barbed wire entanglements and trenches. Then came the realization of how terribly near the Germans were to Paris! The drive to Meaux is easily made in an hour and here at the Hotel de la Sirene we stopped for lunch. The hotel dining room was crowded, but after some waiting we managed to get seats, and were served a few of the unexhausted courses of the usual table d'hote dejeuner.

The little town of Meaux and its old Cathedral especially were decked with flags and flowers and the streets were filled with people in town for the day from Paris, and from the surrounding villages. All of them were walking or driving to a field just north of the town for the celebration of the anniversary of the Battle of the Marne. Only the fact that the Germans had moved so fast that their heavy artillery had been left behind, saved the little town of Meaux from the same complete destruction as that visited upon towns further north.

In the forest of Villers-Cotterêts and the town itself was real devastation. Scattered everywhere were shells, both high

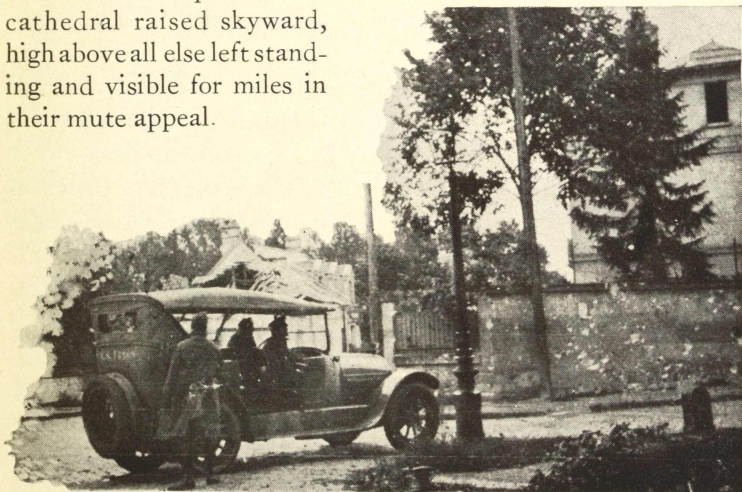


explosive and gas, cartridge belts, helmets, overcoats and all the driftwood, so to speak, of a battle-ground.

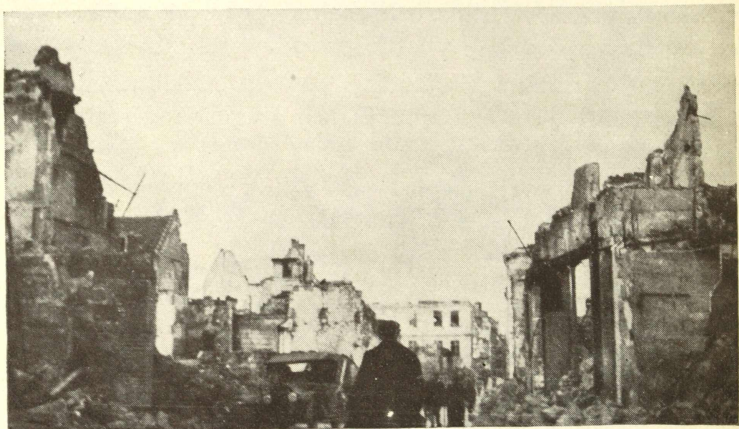
Every tree-trunk left standing was cut and scarred with shrapnel and bullets and around their stumps and roots were machine-gun and rifle pits.

Here and there were graves—each with a rough wooden cross on which hangs a French or German helmet—and in the open fields, just beyond the woods, were filled-in shell craters, in which German dead had been buried en masse.

Our orders read “as near to Soissons as practicable,” so we drove on and entered the remains of that city. As one approached it, the key-note of destruction appeared in the shape of the mutilated twin-spires of the cathedral raised skyward, high above all else left standing and visible for miles in their mute appeal.



A peaceful street corner in war torn Soissons



The iron hail of war left nothing of Soissons but ruins

Except for French soldiers quartered in cellars and in corners of houses that were but partially unroofed, the city was abandoned. Only a few days had elapsed since the Germans had been driven from the eastern part where they had made that desperate last stand in the beet sugar factory before retreating to the hills from whence their artillery fire had been directed.

In the woods on the slopes of the hills on our right, that is, to the south of the villages and the road, completely hidden by woods and camouflage, were the French heavy guns. Their fire was so incessant that it was one continuous crash—louder than the heaviest thunder. In spite of the fact that we were less than one hundred meters from the batteries we could not even see the flashes. These guns were the French “155’s” and were of course firing over our heads. The indescribable whistling of the shells



"Home coming" natives even find difficulty in recognizing the streets

was really quite cheery, as they were heading towards "Fritz." We spent nearly an hour inspecting the cathedral and other ruins, after which the sound of artillery fire to the east tempted us in that direction. Finding it still practicable, we started on the main road toward Fismes and Rheims. Both sides of the road were hung with long strips of camouflage. We noted with interest the condition of this road, and before we returned we were to learn how suddenly it might require attention.

The road from Soissons follows along the River Aisne half way to Braisne and passes through the little villages of Venizel and Sermoise. In what is left of these villages (a few cellars) and in dug-outs in the sides of the road were quartered regiments of French engineers and artillery. In the town only the main streets had been cleared, and the others were still blocked with

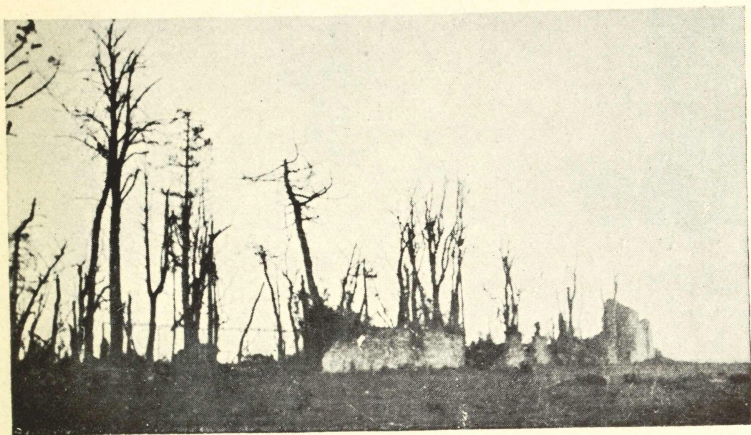


Even the shade has gone in the war torn areas

the stone barricades of the street fighting. Here and there were German road signs left from the Hun occupation, and on many of the stone walls were the long grooves of machine gun bullets.

The French "105's" and "75's" were on our left just across the Aisne and these, as well as their larger sisters, were firing without a pause. Stopping among a group of French engineers, who were sitting outside of their dug-outs waiting for their evening mess, we learned that at this point the Germans had been driven from their trenches along that north bank of the Aisne within the past forty-eight hours.

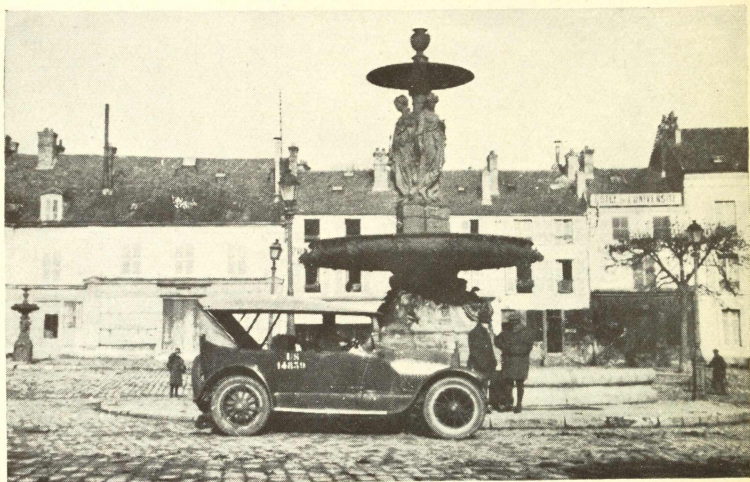
To get a closer view of the proceedings we found a poilu to guide us, and leaving the car on the road, we stepped into the woods and into one of the communication trenches. We followed this trench as it zig-zagged down to the river bank and along it



Farm buildings near Villers-Cotterets

to a new pontoon bridge made of wine-barrels, with foot boards laid across them. Crossing this, we climbed up the slippery clay bank and found a fringe of trees along the edge with a row of listening posts, rifle pits for snipers and machine-gun nests dug among the tree roots. These were literally strewn with German rifles, hand grenades, ammunition, clothing, trench knives and spades of the short, trench-tool variety—all showing evidence of having been dropped and abandoned in haste. The hills were distant about three miles or less, and among them were the present front-line trenches.

We decided to go nearer and were just about to cross that first open field, when a part of it detached itself from the landscape and stood up on its hind legs, so to speak. Our poilu explained that it was just one of the medium-sized Boche shells; then



Yankee doughboys have brought home an eye for the beautiful in architecture proceeded to call our attention to the differences in the sounds of the various shells sailing over our heads, some of which were French, just as we had supposed, but just as many were Boche going the other way! He then remarked that he presumed we knew we were in plain view out there in the open.

That was another new idea. We guessed it was about supper time, anyway! We were doing a bit of thinking and remembered that our unprotected Cadillac was standing on the open road without the slightest bit of screen or camouflage. So we re-crossed the Aisne and returned through the trench to our car.

The car was still intact, but that road, if not the car itself, was very evidently an object of interest to "Fritz." In the



short half hour that had elapsed since we had left the car, "road repairs" had become necessary! Not far from our Cadillac, and exactly in the center of that nice white stone road, was a brand new shell crater about six feet in diameter.

Before stowing ourselves for a comfortable homeward ride, we stood out in the open for a moment, up on the side of the trench, for one last look at the Valley of the Aisne. As we stood there, the sun, just before dropping behind the hills, broke through the clouds and flooded the valley with yellow light, touching the western slope of each hill and the western side of each grove as though with gold. It was a sight that I shall never forget. Except for those infrequent puffs of earth leaping into the air from the few shells bursting in the open, such as we had seen at close range across the Aisne, most of the Boche shells were dropping in the woods near the French batteries where they could not be seen, and nothing of the immediate presence of battle was apparent to the eye. It was just a beautiful green and gold valley, traversed by the winding Aisne, with here and there the crumbling stone walls of farm buildings and mills, and beyond this, as a background, these rolling green and gold hills. Yet to the ear that artillery fire was almost deafening, and we knew that among those hills was the battle-line with its hideous trenches and dug-outs, and in and around them the wounded and dying.

Rewarding out poilu guide and his friends with cigarettes, we wished them good luck just as the car came up the road from the mess camp, loaded with soup, bread and meat and that vinegar-like red wine—"pinard," more essential to the French soldier than his meat ration—for their evening meal.



We drove back through Soissons and, a few miles beyond, picked up a French officer of artillery. He had a little hand satchel, and was trudging along in the mud on the start of a ten-mile walk to Villers-Cotterêts, where he would catch a train for Paris and a well-earned seven days leave or permission. Of course we took him aboard and listened to his enthusiastic French ravings about the wonders of the Cadillac—"cette grande et si merveilleuse automobile Americaine!" We knew all about that, but in French it sounded even stronger than in English.

Early in the game the French admitted the superiority of the Cadillac, and in spite of the shortage for our own needs our Motor Transport Corps is said to have had to sell a shipment of ten Cadillac limousines to the French General Staff—much to the fury of the other branches of our Army!

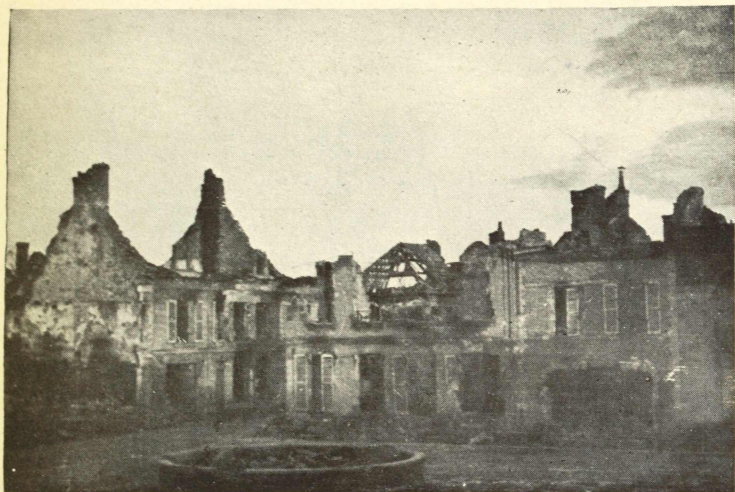
At Villers-Cotterêts he left us to join the brother officers who were going on leave with him while we turned south to La Ferte Milon and thence by the direct road to Meaux. We were too late for dinner at the Hotel Sirene when we reached Meaux, so we drove on to Paris.

Here our Cadillac was returned to the garage and we entered the hotel for a belated dinner.

When I went over that road for the last time in my own Cadillac the French peasants were already preparing the rich fields in the Aisne valley for crops in 1919.

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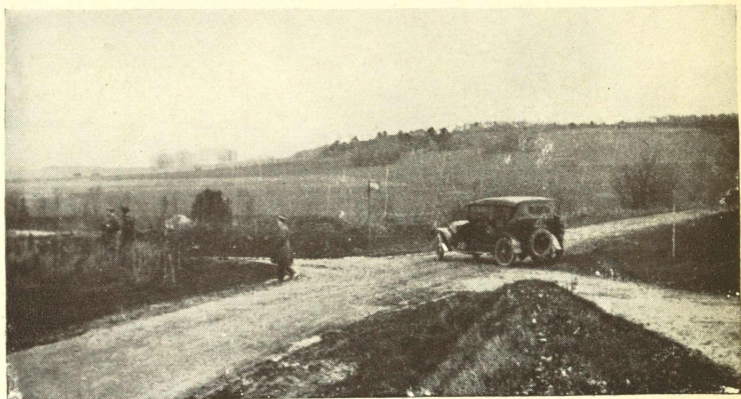
*Major Waterman is well qualified to make the graphic definition of war service which follows, after the wide range of his Army transportation service in France.*



Where Frenchmen bartered and women gossiped—the market place at Fismes

The phrase “war-time conditions” in connection with transportation means more than simply road conditions and absence of speed laws. It means more than a race track stake—a purse and the lives of driver and mechanic! On many of these trips under A. E. F. travel orders, the stakes were many lives—a whole regiment or even an entire army corps that might be saved or lost. So risks were taken that would never be dreamed of under ordinary conditions.

In the Air Service Transportation Garages in Paris, I had an average thirty Cadillacs, and used from fifteen to twenty of them as “road cars”—that is, cars that were kept filled with gasoline and oil (and with extra “bidons” of gas and oil ready



"We remembered that our unprotected Cadillac was standing on the open road, without the slightest bit of screen or camouflage."

to be strapped on the running boards for long runs) and ready to start on a moment's notice night and day. During every hour of the twenty-four there was a soldier chauffeur "on duty" with every road car and an extra shift asleep in the garage dormitory.

When a drive was on—such as Chateau Thierry or St. Mihiel—all of these road cars would be going night and day for two or three weeks. Sometimes there would be different passengers and the drivers would alternate every two or three days, but often there would be the same driver and officer for a week at a stretch—the officer doing his sleeping while being driven from place to place, and the driver sleeping in the car during the stops. As the average driving speed was forty miles per hour and the runs might be from one hundred to two hundred miles at a stretch, it may be seen that, even if the cars

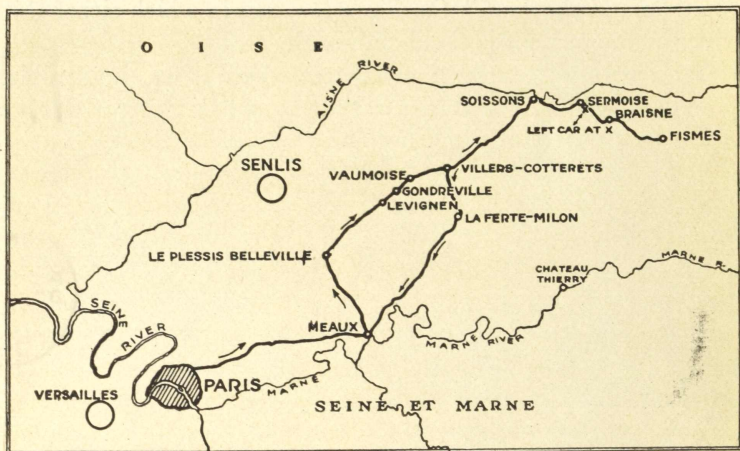


would "stand the gaff," there are few cars in which either the driver or the passenger could endure the strain.

There were, of course, many places where it was impossible to make speed and where ease of control and handling with two wheels in a gutter or ditch became an essential for miles at a stretch. Here the Cadillac, with its wonderful range of power on high gear, was easily the best. This was especially noted on those shell-torn arteries parallel with the lines that fed the armies with ammunition, food and all supplies. On these roads were endless streams of trucks—supply trains, artillery trains and enormous truck trains carrying troops from one sector to another, or coming from the rear to take their turn in the front lines.

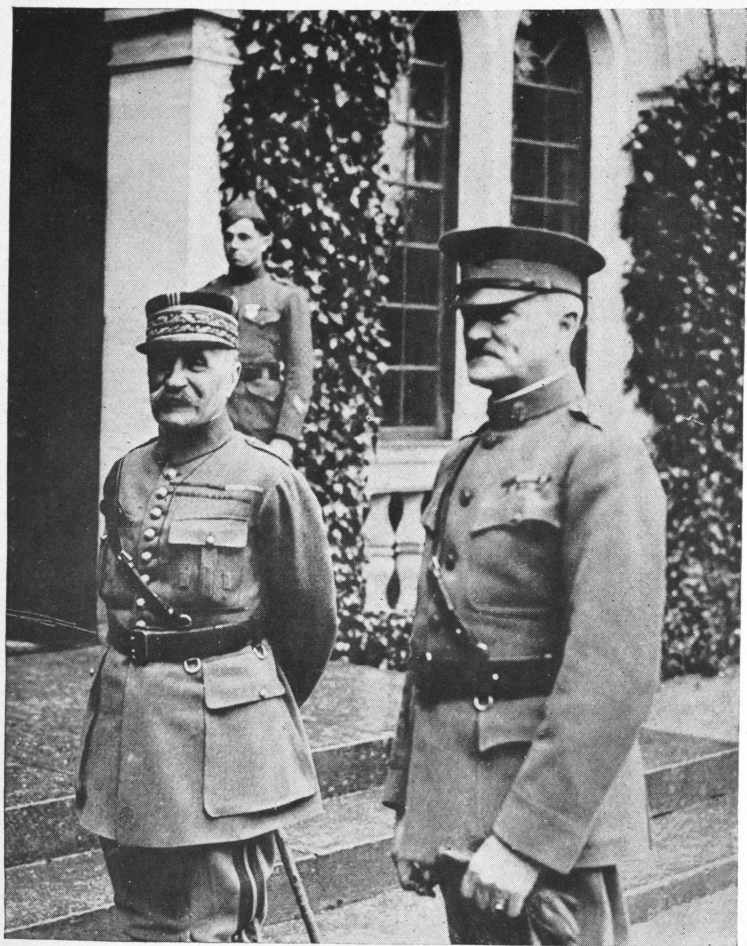
These were the war-time conditions under which the Cadillac earned its reputation for dependability, comfort and speed. The only speed laws were the laws of gravitation on the bumps and centrifugal force in taking the turns. These conditions can never be duplicated.

On such roads as those on which our best time always had to be made it was not the first hour that showed up the weak points. It was the second and the succeeding hours at the same forty to fifty mile average. A trip from Paris to Chaumont in three and one-half hours (the fastest express train takes five and one-half) in a Cadillac is one of the best examples of this. On arrival on this particular trip, as in many similar cases, there was only enough time to refill with gas, oil and water before starting on the return trip. After a run of much less distance on smooth steel rails a locomotive must be looked over from end to end. After faster and longer trips on roads of varying roughness our Cadillac road cars, because of urgent requirements,



could only be given the “wash” (required under the Pershing regime) and a hasty “once over” with oil and grease before starting out again. We were fortunate if every three weeks or a month we could spare each car for part of a day for a more complete looking over.

After such a run from Paris to Chaumont and return (approximately three hundred and eighty miles) or an equally rough round trip between Paris and the First Air Depot at Colombey les Belles, it was certainly restful to cut loose in the South of France where the great “Routes Nationales” were still white and boulevard-smooth. It was even restful to strike “Belgian block”—that European cobblestone that paves so many miles of road leading into and around Paris and the smaller towns. It is surprising to find how smooth cobblestones are—if you drive over them fast enough!



Marshall Foch and General Pershing meet at Chaumont, General Headquarters





